Indian Bureaucracy:Maladies and Remedies

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ABSTRACT

Bureaucracy has a very long history in India but other societies, too, created bureaucracies out of necessity.ontrol corruption through streaming administrative procedures, introducing transparency, and taking other suitable measures; freedom of information is a valuable tool in this regard. Remove elitism from civil services and make bureaucracy more service-oriented and courteous. Eliminate undue political control and unnecessary political interference in day-to-day administrative activities.That should, with lunch, go a long way towards ensuring that the country has in place a governance structure that is specialized, efficient honest, and responsive. Only then could India become a fully developed country that take its rightful place in the comity of nations - a deserved claimant to the superpower status. It is hoped this golden opportunity to reform bureaucracy will not be missed and the government proves wrong the statement made by an astute observer of the Indian scene: 'India never misses an opportunity.

Bureaucracy has a very long history in India but other societies, too, created bureaucracies out of necessity. In Egypt's Old Kingdom, for instance, bureaucracy was a key factor in the inception of its renowned civilization. Bureaucrats were expected to have tact and good manners, and display humility. It is perhaps for this reason that Egyptian officials were called civil servants, a designation that governments have adopted down thought the ages. China has had a large bureaucracy for a long time with officials selected on the basis of merit ; thus , in the Seventh Century A.D. Government job applicants had to write essays about Confucian philosophy and compose poetry ! This practice gave chance even to a lowly peasant to become a mandarin. India's civil servants, the new guardians, have failed the country. The governance structure, in general, has not performed satisfactorily on most, if not all, relevant considerations. The elements of good governance were summed up well in the Human Development Report, 1997, by the United Nations Development Program thus: people's participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation in decision making, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision. That the scores in India on these criteria have been low is acknowledged widely.

There is a thus a clear and urgent need to improve India's governance. However, we should look at the issues dispassionately - examining the bureaucratic system rather than looking at individual bureaucrats. Civil services work within a system where politicians are ruling, but ruling badly. True, some bureaucrats are inefficient, uncaring, and dishonest to boot, but the malaise is omnipresent in Indian society; a large number of industrialists and businessmen are corrupt and so are many professionals, farmers, shopkeepers, craftsmen, mechanics, or taxiwallahs. Therefore, let us not pick unnecessarily on civil servants alone.

The right policy would be to do away with all reservations - based on caste/tribe/religion/creed/sect/region or other divisive considerations

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- and to follow affirmative principles wherever warranted, in jobs or in educational institutions. Models of corrective action for all disadvantaged sections (backward or forward) followed in other countries (including the United States) should be studied for formulating plans suiting the conditions prevailing in India and better execution. Indian bureaucrats - although known for being well endowed with intelligence - often fail as managers. According to Gurcharan Das, 'Indians tend to blame ideology or democracy for their failures, but the problem is that they value ideas over accomplishments. He cites the case of Delhi Metro as an example of successful execution: 'Great strides are being made on the Delhi Metro not because the project was brilliantly conceived but because its leader sets clear, measurable goals, monitors day-today progress, and persistently removes obstacles. Most Indian politicians and civil servants, in contrast, fail to plan their projects well, monitor them, or follow through on them: their performance failures mostly have to do with poor execution.

Such changes in attitudes and in approaches to achieving results on the ground would require a lot of prodding and pushing as Indian administrators, by and large, believe in status quo; they want maintain the quo even when it has lost status! Normally, they do not want to navigate untrodden paths

Coming back to the administrative reforms panel, it appears that the Commission's terms of reference are wide enough to include all relevant issues directly or indirectly. Thus, now it all depends upon the diligence of the Members and the thoroughness with which they, and their staff, tackle and extremely important and urgent issues of proper governance. The country, and especially the more directly affected parties - while wishing the Commission well in discharging its onerous duties - await its findings and recommendations.

To come back to our main focus - civil service reforms - the major proposals made in earlier chapters are summarized below:

Give recognition to technocrats/specialists as extended - in ample measure - to generalist civil servants (members of the IAS and Allied Services and of Provincial Civil Services); this can be achieved easily by opening up promotional channels to technocrats/specialists that are currently denied to them and by granting them parity, requisite powers, and financial rewards.

Establish additional, technical/specialized All-India Services (medical and public health, engineering, agriculture, science and technology, etc.) to be manned by technically qualified people (technocrats/specialists) and not by nontechnical regular bureaucrats. The financial and non-monetary rewards available to these technocrats should be fully comparable to those enjoyed by members of the IAS and Allied Services. Then the technical people (doctors, engineers, agricultural scientists, etc.) - trained for long periods on considerable cost to the government - will naturally stay in their own specialized disciplines in preference to joining the generalist services like the IAS where, admittedly and most unfortunately, their specialized training is not utilized.

Induct more, qualified and experienced, outsiders (from academic, industry, NGOs, etc. Including experts from abroad - NRIs and PIOs) at middle and senior levels of civil services. This, for instance, was done by Prime Minister Rajiv

Gandhi who invited Sam Pitroda from the United States to improve the telecom structure. Earlier, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru had recruited outstanding public men and women (also some from among the rulers of princely states - large and small) on a noticeable scale for India's Foreign Service. Increase slightly the number of political appointees in specialized positions where specialized knowledge/experience is needed and policy content of responsibilities in high. These posts would fall between the level of ministers and the upper echelons of bureaucracy, and would be new and/or created by converting some senior or upper middle level posts of the civil service. Such appointees will, of course, not belong to the civil service.

Encourage interchange of personnel between academy, public/private sector units, and civil services. Improve accountability, efficiency, and responsiveness of bureaucracy. New personnel policy measures should be tried, e.g. recruiting bureaucrats for short periods - on contracts that could be renewed when deemed necessary or desirable. Control corruption through streaming administrative procedures, introducing transparency, and taking other suitable measures; freedom of information is a valuable tool in this regard. Remove elitism from civil services and make bureaucracy more service-oriented and courteous. Eliminate undue political control and unnecessary political interference in day-to-day administrative activities.

Reduce significantly the size of our mammoth bureaucracy - exercise girth control. In some areas posts have been reduced over the years due partly to the pressure put by international financial institutions, but such reductions have not been adequate. Despite growing needs to provide public services to ever-increasing population, it should be possible to phase out a large number of jobs in a majority of government departments. However, such decisions should be based on a case-by-case consideration. According to the report, although India slipped one point in the relative ranking in 2005, it nevertheless reinforced its offerings. The report talked about India's notable contributions in on-line participation,

The top-heavy bureaucratic structure in India has changed the organizational pyramid into more of a cylinder and if the trend continues we will soon have an inverted pyramid! Heedless upgrading of posts through cadre reviews is certainly an undesirable practice. A large number of posts should be eliminated right away in the interest of economy and productivity. In this connection, there used to be a law in Japan setting Total Staff Numbers under which staff ceilings were reviewed and reported to the parliament for reduction. We should consider enacting similar legislation, and utilize zero-base budgeting and other measures to ensure that useless posts and departments get axed unceremoniously.

Appoint technocrats as Secretaries of four of five additional technical departments at the Centre and in the States - in Medical and Public Health, Agriculture, Forestry, Science and Technology, etc. - as the fist installment. Some technical departments at the Centre do have technocrats working as Secretaries, e.g. the Department of Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education, and of Biotechnology. In states where even directors of technical departments are IAS/PCS officers, the practice should be discontinued and technocrats placed in those posts. This overdue recognition of the value and relevance of technically qualified people in the

emerging, development-oriented environment is bound to speed up economic progress in India. Develop and enforce a fair transfer policy to provide security of tenure, say for two or three years, so the civil servant can concentrate on work.

The set of immediate reforms suggested above is doable. Necessary action can be taken administratively - through simple notifications or ordinances. In a large number of cases affecting personnel, the Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers are empowered to take interim/short-term decisions. In the meanwhile, any needed legislative processes should be set in motion. Political will, found sorely lacking during recent decades, should be mustered for effecting meaningful reforms. If this cannot be done, talking about reforms would be hypocritical besides being a complete waste of time.

Conclusion:

The resulting bureaucracy will habitually look at its own functioning and engage continually in improving its performance without having to be pushed from outside. It is really all about building an entrepreneurial-minded civil service with a built-in drive to improve, so as to become self-renewing.

Soon after taking over as prime minister, Manmohan Singh had indicated that bureaucratic reform would be a high priority of his government. This declaration of intent and a few preliminary actions announced by him shortly after taking over reminded one of the swift and forceful moves made by the prime minister of the U.K., Margaret Thatcher (the Iron Lady), who came to power in the winter of 1979, pledging to revive the country's slumping economy - by, among other things, reducing the size of, and reforming, the big bureaucracy. At her very first cabinet meeting, Tharcher announced a hiring freeze and a three percent cut in the civil service; several months later,

she imposed an additional five percent cut. The insight into governance processes both at macro and micro levels, particularly in different posts that the author had the privilege of holding in India, was valuable indeed. Naturally, in high-level appointive positions one has to deal with the political leadership, which makes the person appreciate the need for interactive and collaborative relationship between the political bosses in a democracy and the bureaucrats whose role is to execute the policies laid down by the former. At the same time, it is well accepted, and is indeed desirable, for senior-level bureaucrats to tender their considered and frank advice at the policy formulation stage.

It is imperative that India's political leaders, senior bureaucrats, and others who lay down/influence/execute policies rose above partnership and their short-term narrow agendas, and acted with vigour and promptness in translating the SAARC's recommendations that are considered meritorious. That should, with lunch, go a long way towards ensuring that the country has in place a governance structure that is specialized, efficient honest, and responsive. Only then could India become a fully developed country that take its rightful place in the comity of nations - a deserved claimant to the superpower status. It is hoped this golden opportunity to reform bureaucracy will not be missed and the government proves wrong the statement made by an astute observer of the Indian scene: 'India never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity!'

Conclusion:

Realizing the value of getting its findings and recommendations to the government expeditiously, SARC had decided some time ago to submit reports in phases. Thus, it

presented the first one, on right to information, the Prime Minister on June 9, 2006. Other reports to come will cover subjects like crisis management, public order, and National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. And, in the second phase, the Commission proposes to submit reports on organizational structure of the central government, ethics in governance, refurbishing of administration, and local self-government and panchayati raj institutions.

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